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THE DIARY OF A PAGAN.

THE great sale of Nansen's "Farthest North," even at the high price at which it is published, witnesses to the unabated interest which the world takes in the exploration of the desolate regions of the pole. There is an intense fascination in the thought of penetrating to a portion of our earth where no human being has ever been before; and, however great the labor and the cost, there is no reproach of waste if even a degree or two of latitude be added to man's knowledge of the North.

Nansen is entitled to the credit and the profit of his penetration to the highest latitudes ever reached by man, and both credit and profit have been bestowed with no grudging hand. He set out with a theory of an arctic drift current that was generally scouted by the scientific world. He proved his theory true by letting his vessel freeze up and then drifting where he expected to. He did not reach the pole, nor did he more than faintly hope to, but he drifted right across the polar basin higher up than any vessel had ever been before. Then in a sledge he pushed on to within 250 miles of the pole. And he came back safe and sound with all his company, within the time he had allowed himself.

The voyage of the "Fram" settles many questions. First, it settles the hotly disputed question of an uninterrupted ice-drift from Siberia to Greenland, and renders it almost impossible to believe any longer that there is any considerable body of land around the pole. In all probability the rugged ice plain which Nansen traversed in his sledge extends over the pole itself. It proves the profound depth of these polar waters beneath their covering of ice, no bottom having been found at 2,000 fathoms (nearly $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles) at many points along the passage. It proves the possibility of constructing a vessel so stout that it can resist the enormous grinding pressure of the jamming and packing ice. It proves the

possibility of so equipping an expedition that none shall suffer from scurvy or indeed any other disease, or shall even experience hardship or serious discomfort, during a three years' sojourn in the arctic regions. The expedition was a brilliant scientific success. It brought back a great mass of observations of every conceivable geographical and hydrographical and meteorological sort, that it will take a long time yet to arrange and tabulate and draw positive conclusions from.

But, apart from its scientific interest, the record of three years of the life of thirteen men wholly isolated from the rest of the race must have a deep human interest too. It was within Dr. Nansen's choice to make his book little else than a narrative of the vessel's progress and his scientific observations. But the diary which is contained in the two portly and handsome volumes of the Messrs. Harper is much more than this. It takes us into the inner life of the chief of the expedition, and lays bare his hopes and fears, his longings and disappointments. And as such it is a very curious study. It is the diary of a modern scientific pagan.

Dr. Nansen has no real system of philosophy. So far as he approaches any system, a collection of his reflections and meditations would set forth a sort of vague, shallow pessimism. There is no word in all his confidences to indicate that anything partaking in the least of the nature of a "reasonable religious hope" finds any place in his breast. Any belief in Christianity he has long ago cast away. He is not even a theist. The emotions that sublime scenes rouse in even the savage nature are not wanting in him, and they struggle for utterance in his diary sometimes, struggle with indefiniteness of thought and feebleness of expression. But the strange thing is that in a mind essentially simple, in a nature unsophisticated, there should be no trace of a feeling of a personal God or suggestion of a personal faith.

The first volume is very much padded. It is the record of a long, uneventful drift in the ice. Comfort and luxury reign on board and the stern wildness of the storm-swept, frozen plain without. With the greatest variety and abun-

dance of food, with electric lights and books and cards and cigars and games, the time dragged slowly along, and the chief topic of interest was what they would have for dinner. Here and there, all through the first volume come pages of melancholy yearnings after the absolute and the infinite, and reflections upon the vanity of human wishes, interspersed with bills of fare printed in full. "I look into the future and feel as if it does not much matter to me whether I get home this year or next." "Shall I try a few pages of Schopenhauer? No, I will go to bed"—a wise decision. "And as to immortality, happiness is all we want, and that is not to be had here." "And even if we perish, what will it matter in the endless cycles of eternity?"—which is a sort of grandiloquent way of saying it will be all the same in a thousand years.

"I can scarcely make myself out, but who can fathom the depths of the human mind? We are such stuff as dreams are made of." The objection is to printing such stuff. Through six hundred pages these fragmentary philosophizings in melancholy vein dispute rank in point of frequency with lists of canned food. "Man's life is nothing but a succession of moods, half memory and half hope." "Yesterday's dinner, hashed fish, canned rabbit with potatoes and French beans, stewed bilberries and cranberries with milk." The whyness of the wherefore and "baked toad-in-the-hole." Incoherent yearnings and "Ringnes bock beer." "The years are passing here and what do they bring? nothing but dust, dry dust." "Every one had eaten so much dinner that supper had to be skipped altogether."

Added to his absence of religion is a strong leaning toward superstition. "We are the tools of powers beyond us, we are born under lucky or unlucky stars." When they have passed Cape Chelyuskin, the most northerly point of the old world, he writes, "Only one star was to be seen. Was it my star? I could not help sitting watching it." On his daughter's birthday he sees her star and counts it a lucky day, and another star is the "home-star." What a strange

jumble it is—no God to guide the universe, yet a great blazing sun hundreds of millions of miles away controlling the life of an individual human being.

When he is contemplating leaving the vessel on his memorable sledge journey he fortifies himself with declarations of the might of human will. "I shall come back, I know it. I have strength enough for the task," and then "Be thou true unto death and thou shalt inherit the crown of life." Was the Apocalypse ever so abused? Then he quotes Carlyle: "A man shall and must be valiant, he must march forward and quit himself like a man, trusting imperturbably in the appointment and choice of the Upper Powers." "I have not, it is true, any Upper Powers." One can imagine how the sage of Chelsea would deal with his self-sufficient admirer, if indeed the sage of Chelsea ever wrote the words quoted. W. S. Gilbert could furnish a more appropriate quotation than either St. John the Divine or Carlyle.

Come, mighty Must,
Inevitable Shall,
In thee I trust
Time weaves my coronal.

That comes nearer expressing the Nansen philosophy than any other lines in English.

The real interest of the book begins with the only real peril and difficulty of the whole enterprise, and that is the sledge journey of Dr. Nansen and Lieut. Johansen, which we reach when we are well along in the second volume. They left the vessel on the 14th of March with two canoes fastened upon sledges drawn by twenty-six dogs and loaded with provisions for three months, to push as far north as possible, to reach the pole if it might be. But it might not. The photographs of the ice over which they had to travel give a better explanation of why they got no farther than any words can. They found themselves amidst ice floes that had frozen and thawed, and drifted and packed, and split and jammed, and superimposed themselves year after year for countless winters and summers. Hills and valleys and ridges and moraines, gulleys and lanes and hummocks

and pressure-mounds, rubble and slush and "chaos of ice blocks stretching as far as the horizon," this is what they had to traverse, and all the time there was the infinitely discouraging certainty that they were drifting south with the whole ice-field, as well as traveling north upon it.

So after a twenty-four days' fight they turned back in latitude $86^{\circ} 13'$ and made south, right across the track on which the Fram was to drift some months later, for the nearest known land, Kaiser Franz Josef Land, four hundred and fifty miles away.

Dog after dog had to be sacrificed to the revolting necessity of feeding the others. "When the first dog was dismembered and given to the others many of them went supperless to bed in preference to touching the meat. But as the days went by and they became more worn out they learned to appreciate dog's flesh. . . . It was necessary; we turned our eyes away and hardened ourselves." Not until the 24th of July did they see the land they had so long expected to reach. Only two dogs were left, and each sledge had a man and a dog harnessed to it, dragging wearily the lessened load.

While Nansen is bravely struggling these long months with the tremendous difficulties and dangers of the situation, while he is enduring uncomplainingly the "inconceivable toil" of pushing and dragging the sledge over ice-fields that look in the photograph like a stone-quarry after a dynamite blast, while he is slowly and painfully laboring now through fresh snow knee-deep, now through treacherous new ice that gives way at every step, scrambling as best he may over hill and dale, up and down, over block after block, and ridge after ridge, with deep clefts in between," and still conscientiously making and recording his scientific observations, one rises to an almost unqualified admiration of the man. There is no whining, no yearning; there are no stars of destiny, no infinite cycles, but simply a brave man straining every nerve and faculty to accomplish a task almost beyond man's power.

But as soon as land is reached and the hut is built and he

crawls into comfortable winter quarters, and has nothing to do but sleep, and is full of bear's meat and walrus blubber, then he resumes his morbid melancholy and apostrophizes the universe thus. "O starlit night, thou art wonderfully beautiful! But dost thou not lend our spirit too mighty wings, greater than we can control? Couldst thou but solve the riddle of existence! We feel ourselves the center of the universe, and struggle for life, for immortality, while thy silent splendor proclaims: 'At the command of the Eternal you came into existence on a paltry planet as diminutive links in the endless chain of transformations; at another command you will be wiped out again,' " and so on. One would so much rather hear more about the fox that stole his registering thermometer than all this "cosmic emotion." One would so much rather hear more of his encounters with bears and the strange family habits of his walrus herds.

They keep Christmas, he and that silent, faithful companion of his of whom we seem to know so little—they keep Christmas as on board the "Fram" Christmas and Easter and Whitsuntide all the holidays and festivals were kept, with much thinking about absent dear ones and such feasting as circumstances allowed, but with not the slightest suggestion of even the knowledge of what the day means. They keep Christmas as a modern Jew keeps it.

And when on the resumption of the journey in the spring, Nansen and Johansen most unexpectedly and happily hit upon Jackson's expeditionary depot at Cape Flora, barely below the eighteenth parallel, and all toil and privation are over; when on Jackson's vessel they beat out of Arctic waters that summer and return to Norway, and scarce have reached their fatherland ere they learn that the "Fram" also has returned; when thus the whole undertaking makes a most successful conclusion with never a loss or misadventure of any kind to throw a shadow of regret over the reunion—why, there is much mutual congratulation, much proud rejoicing—and that is all. They might have been Norse voyagers in the fleet of Eric the Red for all of Chris-

tian praise rendered. As no lips utter recorded *Christe eleison* on the whole voyage, so no *Te Deum* acclaims its glad end. They leave without a word of prayer, and return without a word of thanks.

One cannot think that all the crew were thus minded, though for any word Nansen writes they were, save indeed for this isolated incident, that one of the sailors—his name was Amundsen—hated playing-cards and called them “the Devil’s book.” That little piece of bald Puritanism is positively refreshing amidst the utter blank irreligion of a pagan’s diary.

HUDSON STUCK.